

# LANGUAGE POLICIES OF PORTUGAL

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Language policies are crucial in planning the national educational curricula and the cultural and linguistic integration of immigrants.

I conducted an interview with the Ambassador of Portugal, Mr. Jorge Cabral on behalf of the Diplomatic Observer regarding the linguistic policies of Portugal.



### Which languages are spoken in Portugal?

Portuguese.

**A**s you know, Portugal is the root of Portuguese language – a language that is now the 4th most spoken in the world, in 5 continents, being the native tongue of more than 250 million people.

On the northeast part of Portugal, concretely in three municipalities, Miranda do Douro, Vimioso and Mogadouro, another language is also spoken. It is called Mirandese. This is also a “Latin based” language, spoken by 5000 to 15000 people only. Since 1999 it is a co-official language, which means its use is recognized for local matters.

And of course, Portuguese sign language is also recognized by the Portuguese Constitution.

### How was the Portuguese language developed?

Last year, Portuguese commemorated its 800 years of existence. We count this date from the first document written in Portuguese – the Will of the third King of Portugal, Afonso II, written in 1214. With this in mind, and knowing that in order to be written it had to be previously spoken, it had to enjoy “popularity”, we can say that Portuguese is spoken for more than 800 years.

Portuguese is part of the Ibero-romanian group of languages that evolved from Vulgar Latin, in the medieval Kingdom of Galicia, north of what is Portugal today. In those days, in the Iberian Peninsula, two languages achieved and enjoyed great popularity: Castellaño, that we call Spanish today, and Galician-Portuguese, which is the

base of Portuguese language, in a way, “the mother of Portuguese language”. Throughout the medieval period and until the midst of the 12th century, what we had in all Iberia was basically this: official documents, of matters of State for example, were written in Castellano; on the other hand, Galician-Portuguese was the language of poetry, music, arts... This was true even after 1143, the year that Afonso Henriques became the first King of Portugal. We must understand that the almost immediate connection that we establish today between language and nationality did not exist in those days. Years passed, and with the independence of Portugal becoming more consolidated, Portuguese started to evolve and finally got completely separated from its “mother”, the Galician-Portuguese, in the 13th century.

It is a “Latin based” language, from the same family of Spanish, French or Italian, although with some influence, mainly in vocabulary, also from Arabic. We should not forget that Muslim kings ruled Iberia from the 8th to the 12th/13th centuries, reason why a couple of words and expressions remained as a heritage of that period.

And due to the travels of the Portuguese, the famous “Discoveries” – let’s not forget the Portuguese were the first to sail the Atlantic Ocean – Portuguese language was also taken to Africa, Asia and the Americas, where it stayed.

Nowadays, it is a language spoken by more than 250 million people. Only Chinese Mandarin, Spanish and English have more speakers in the world than Portuguese.

### Does Portuguese have any dialects?

Well, being such a big language,

official in so many countries – Portugal, Brazil, Angola, Mozambique, Cape Vert, São Tomé and Príncipe, Guinea-Bissau, Equatorial Guinea, East Timor, Macao (part of China) – it is clear that geography enriches the language.

As a side note, I would like to mention that these countries have established a multilateral organization based on the shared language, called CPLP – Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries. Turkey is an associate observer of our community since 2014. That makes us very proud! And it shows that the Turkish State values our language and sees its potential.

Today we point to two variants of Portuguese – European Portuguese and Brazilian Portuguese. It’s the same language albeit with different accents, the latter having a delicious tropical flavor, and with minor syntactic differences. The same thing happens to English and to Spanish, I believe.

In terms of dialects, in Portugal alone there are a lot: linguistic experts point to 10. However there are no big differences. Let’s think of Turkish: people from Ankara have their dialect, different from Izmir for example. But communication is not affected.

### Are there any minorities in Portugal? What is the language policies related to them?

The speakers of Mirandese, as I pointed before, for example, can be considered a minority. The teaching of Mirandese is provided and its learning is stimulated in that geographic area. There is also a traditional semi-nomadic community of Iberian Roma, comprised of some 50 000 members, which has partially preserved its lifestyle, but mainly speaks Portuguese.



## PORTUGAL

**What do you think about the Portuguese speaking politicians? Which ones of their linguistic expressions make the Portuguese or foreign countries happy, sad, and angry?**

I never thought about it in those terms... Well, let's just say that most politicians express themselves quite well... Managing the art of rhetoric was part of a statesman education and a compulsory skill; in Portugal, as in many other countries, it now became simplified through the usage of modern means of technological communication such as Face book and Twitter.

**What are your linguistic policies for the diffusion of the Portuguese language?**

In Portugal, "the Camões - Institute of Cooperation and Language", is the institution responsible for the promotion of Portuguese language and culture in the world.

Camões is an autonomous public body of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which in my view signals very clearly the importance we accord to promoting Portuguese language abroad. It is one of the pillars of our Foreign Policy.

Camões is responsible for all the teaching of Portuguese around the world, at all levels of education. Teachers, Instructors, Lecturers of Portuguese are assigned and posted in hundreds of schools and universities in the whole world. They are fully or partially paid by Camões, and their job is not only to teach Portuguese but also to promote cultural activities, events, to raise the visibility of our language. For example, we established a Lectureship at Ankara University ten years ago. Now, our Lecturer has more than 100 students of Portuguese and we organize several cultural events - concerts, exhibitions, etc. We are also working hard with a view to create a second Lectureship at a University in Istanbul.

**What types of Portuguese language programs do you have for the immigrants?**

Portugal has traditionally been a country of emigrants. Like Turks, "we are everywhere". They are Portuguese; they have the right to learn their mother language. The Secretary of State of the Portuguese Communities, part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, together with Camões, the local Ministries of Education and sometimes in association with local immigrant associations, provide language courses. This happens mostly in countries where communities are very big, such as France, Germany, and the USA. There is also the chance of learning online - online courses are provided by the Camões and by the Portuguese Open University, for example.

Since the late 90's, we also became an immigration country; most of the migrants we received, however, come from Portuguese speaking countries, the largest expatriate community being by far the Brazilians. We also have a quite prominent Diaspora of Ukrainians, Moldovans. The Portuguese High Commissioner for Immigration and Intercultural Dialogue has worked with relevant partners, such as municipalities and schools, to provide Portuguese courses to these communities. Together with their strong work ethics and their love for their new country, this has proven an excellent strategy and they are highly well integrated.

**What types of language programs do you have for the blind?**

Special education falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Science. Education is a right of all. People with special needs have the right to the best education possible, and there are special programs and special schools for blind people. The work of associations must be valued as

well. For example, ACAPO - Portuguese Association for the Blind and Amblyopic - does a very good job on this area. In higher education, several Universities offer audio courses and audio book materials for blind undergraduates and master candidates.

**What types of language programs do you have for the handicapped, for instance, dyslexic people, children suffering from Down syndrome, and children who are victims of certain psychological traumas?**

What I mentioned before, for the case of blind people, also applies to the above mentioned cases. We should also add that psychologists and social workers are posted in public schools, so children can find this kind of support in schools, as well.

**In case of human trafficking, can victims call a center and ask for help, if they cannot speak Portuguese? How do you solve the language issues of foreigners in Portugal? They may become ill, or ask for a funeral service, for instance.**

They can; of course, they can do it. In case they speak English it is very easy and simple. In Portugal, English language is taught to children in public schools, since they are 7 years old. The English proficiency level is very high in our country. Otherwise, translators are available, on a case-by-case basis.

**What are the most important television programs to learn Portuguese?**

The most important one is called "Bom Português", Good Portuguese, and for several years it has been broadcasted by RTP, the public broadcaster, like TRT.

**Can some one learn Portuguese online?**

Yes. And you can learn it very



easily; as already mentioned, Camões Institute offers twice a year semester long high quality courses of Portuguese for foreigners. These courses include video-conference interaction with tutors, group work in forums, and much more. You can check it out on Camões webpage: <http://cvc.instituto-camoes.pt/formacao-a-distancia-geral/novos-cursos.html#.ViYbitrlrkq>

The courses are very well prepared, one can really learn!

**Who are the most famous Portuguese authors who deal with human rights and women's issues in their works?**

Certainly, good Literature is always about the human condition and, therefore, about human rights. But I would cite Saramago who won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1998 as a staunch, politically engaged author who, in his earlier works, depicted human rights' abuses under the 48-year long dictatorship, which ruled Portugal with an iron fist. His book "Blindness" is also considered a metaphor for totalita-

rianism, which deprives people of their critical sense.

In relation to women's rights, among the many writers I could mention, I allow myself to choose Lúcia Jorge who addresses often reproductive rights and the post-colonial legacy in contemporary Portugal. I believe the protagonist of her novel "The wind whistling in the cranes" is an extraordinary character as a young woman exposed to the acrimony of a greedy society.

**Is there any artists dealing with the same issues?**

Of course, there are many. Recently, a Portuguese artist's painting became viral on the internet, because of his depiction of a female fighter, holding a gun in the position of a guitar, while her facial expression reflects both awe and a melodious hope. His name is Carlos Farinha and he is part of the "young generation" of contemporary artists.

Joana Vasconcelos, famous for her installations has, for example, cre-

ated a huge candelabrum made of menstrual tampons, which she titled "Wedding Gown": seen from a distance, it looks like a beautiful "salon" chandelier, but it also has a meaning connected to the way women were traditionally bound to marry, etc. Again the same idea is repeated with her mega high-heel shoe, made of pots and pans.

**What do you think about the freedom of expression in Portugal? Are journalists, artists or writers sued for their controversial ideas? Who sues them? Is there any Muslim minorities? Why?**

Freedom of expression is a well preserved value in Portugal, we praise enormously. All indicators, including international rankings of all sources, point to that. It makes us very happy. We came a long way since 1974, the end of the dictatorship, and the UE accession in 1986 helped us getting where we are today on this matter. There are no relevant law suits raised against artists or journalists for their expressed ideas.

There is a small traditional Muslim minority in Portugal, highly well integrated in the Portuguese society and Lisbon has a beautiful mosque centrally located which is their reference point, besides the gathering place for the Friday prayers. In most major towns in Portugal, you can find a perfectly decent Turkish kebab, for example.

**What do you suggest us to do for learning Portuguese?**

Well, if you are in Ankara you can learn Portuguese in LAMER – the Latin American Studies Center of Ankara University. With our cooperation, and Camões Institute, this Center started to offer Portuguese language courses to the general public last year.

Also, I do really recommend the online courses we mentioned before. ■